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FRANCO-AMERICAN PAMPHLET SERIES

NUMBER 2

Pen, Pills & Pistols

A LOUISIANA CHRONICLE

By Edward Larocque Tinker

DOCTEUR DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE PARIS

NEW YORK

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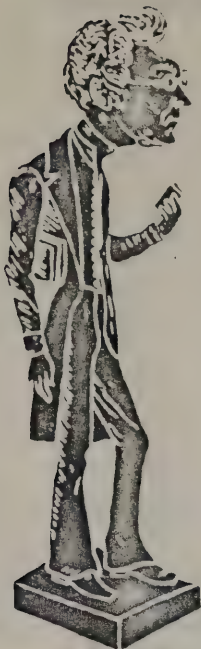
1. Dr. Lombard
2. Dr. Brown
3. Dr. Charles Albright
Lombard (1803-1848)
4. Dr. Rhodes
5. Dr. Valenti

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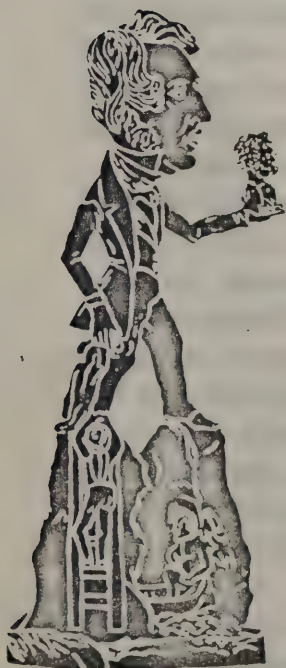
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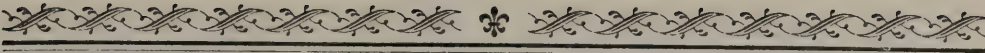


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1. Dr. Lambert
2. Dr. Easton
3. Dr. Charles Aloysius
Luzenberg (1805-1848)
4. Dr. Rhodes
5. Dr. Valetti

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PEN, PILLS & PISTOLS

A LOUISIANA CHRONICLE

THE Creole planters of Louisiana, in the good days before the Civil War ruined them, used to send their sons to be educated at French universities. Many of the boys stayed on after graduating to study medicine and then serve as internes in Parisian hospitals. As a natural consequence, when they finally returned to New Orleans, they were not only well trained in their profession, but were also so impregnated with a taste for French art and literature that they became the most cultivated group in all the state.

A French medical degree was then almost a prerequisite to success in New Orleans, and these men proudly signed after their names the initials D. M. P.—doctor of medicine of Paris—instead of using the prefix of “doctor.”

Occasionally French-born medical men joined this circle, among them Dr. François Prevost who went to Santo Domingo from France and then fled from the Negro uprising to Louisiana in 1800. Being both daring and able, the good doctor determined upon a very daring course when Madame Cadet Marous summoned him to attend her slave girl, who had been so misshapen by infantile rickets that she could not give birth to her child. In a ramshackle, unsanitary Negro cabin in the slave quarters of a plantation near Donaldsonville, he operated on the woman without anaesthetic or any modern surgical aids and, making an incision on the left side, he successfully removed a female child.

This occurred in 1830 and, as it was the first time a Caesarian operation had ever been performed in the United States, the doctor celebrated this historic event by insisting that the infant be christened Cesarine and be freed when she grew up.

Other Louisiana surgeons performed remarkable operations also: notably Dr. Charles A. Lusenberg, who was the first in this country to remove a length of gangrenous intestine in a case of hernia and to successfully suture the ends of the bowels. But in spite of all this surgical pioneering, these doctors made one believe, in their treatment of yellow fever, that Molière was right when he wrote:

"You must never say a person died of fever or pneumonia, but that he died of four physicians and two apothecaries."

Although the epidemics always came in the terrible heat of summer, these medicos put their patients to bed under countless blankets, closed every door and window tight for fear of the slightest draught, and then proceeded to administer the most cruel course of treatment. First they gave a mercurial purge in doses that, now, would hardly be prescribed for a mule and then almost bled the patient white. Luckily few people today know by experience how this was done. The doctor pressed a small cube of bronze on the back of the sick person's neck and touched a spring releasing a flock of tiny knives, which cut into the flesh like a clawing cat. Then, placing a rag saturated with turpentine in a glass he lit it with a match and when the flames had almost died out, he clapped the mouth of the glass over the wounds. The vacuum, thus created, sucked out the blood.

If the saffron sufferer did not die of this treatment or get well in spite of it, the doctors would then "draw out the humors" by placing a heavy blister on the back of the head and over the kidneys, so the poor thing could only lie on his stomach. Water was considered highly dangerous and only four tablespoonfuls of liquid were allowed daily, preferably champagne or orange water flower. It was considered a wise precaution to keep a dish of sliced raw onions near the bedside as they were supposed to absorb the virus, but after a few hours they had to be burned to keep them from spreading the infection and be replaced by fresh ones. The well members of the family were advised to take a purge twice a day, wash themselves all over with an alkali and carry a piece of camphor in their pockets to avoid contagion.

Although, before the Civil War, bleeding was abandoned in favor of leeches, emetics were given in addition to cathartics and quinine was prescribed in doses as large as 200 grains in three days, with opium afterward to quiet the patient; still, the major part of the treatment—blisters, blankets, huge purges and no water—was continued until after the terrible epidemic of 1878. Then a change came about in a very curious way. The allopathic doctors, seeking to confound their homeopathic rivals, caused a comparative table to be made showing the percentages of deaths in cases treated by allopaths and by homeopaths. It was a terrific boomerang. The figures proved all in favor of the homeopaths.

This made the allopaths stop and think. Deciding that the homeopaths merely let Nature take its course, they imitated by modifying the severity of their treatment and their patients got a more "even break" with death.

During this epidemic, one young doctor, just graduated from a school of hydropathy, did invent a new treatment. Believing that the fever should be driven in and smothered, he laid his patients naked on cots, in a current of air if possible, and sprinkled them with a huge watering can filled with cracked ice.

Although he had been one hundred per cent efficient in killing off his patients, he was game when he contracted the fever himself and he took his own medicine. He had himself packed with ice on the operating table in the amphitheatre of the hospital, with all the windows and doors open. Then, as the nurses sprinkled him with ice-water, he took his own temperature and discoursed to the assembled doctors on this theory. When he decided the treatment had gone far enough, he ordered himself put back to bed and in a few hours joined his patients in Heaven—thus saving the city from further decimation. His career has been satirized in a novel with the delightful title—*Dr. Dispatchemic*.

No one who has not lived through it, can imagine the terrible conditions in New Orleans during one of these mid-century epidemics. Every door was kept closed and window shuttered. The town looked dead. The only movement was the flutter of the myriad white funeral notices, tacked to the fences and posts and housefronts. At sunrise and sunset, the booming of cannon rattled windows and great lazy pillars

of black smoke, rising from tar fires in every backyard, hung over the city like streamers of mourning crepe, pinned to the clouds. The Town Council, upon the advice of the Board of Health, had ordered this done in the hope of killing the infection; and, for the same purpose, carbolic acid was poured into the deep open sewers which ran along each curb.

The cry—"Bring out yo' dead!"—echoed gruesomely through the streets in the early mornings as wagons made the rounds to collect the bodies of the poor who had died in the night. Wrapped only in sheets, they were dumped like refuse into the carts. Huge cotton floats, drawn by four lathered mules, bumped over the cobbles, bearing great pyramids of coffins, piled high and dripping disinfectants.

The street to the cemetery was just a varied ghastly funeral procession—black-plumed hearses followed by carriages,—a man balancing a child's coffin on his shoulder, his eyes streaming tears—an old woman and a boy tugging at a child's wagon on which a cheap casket was perched—a drunken Irishman singing a bawdy song as he drove a dump-cart filled with cadavers—a pock-marked Negro, pushing a wheelbarrow loaded crosswise with a long pine box, and a black frocked, frightened woman with a child in her arms following on behind—all this, and more, one saw.

At the gates milled a rabble of old colored people, selling sweetmeats and bellywash, some with their candies spread out on tables, others with their wares in baskets on their arms.

Great green bottle-flies, so gorged they were lethargic, swarmed over the "dainties" of the vendors, who waved futile brushes made of gaily colored strips of paper as they called:

"Pralines! Pralines!," or

"*Bel calas! Bel Calas tout chauds!*," or

"*Bière Crèole! Tout frais!*"

Inside the stench was dreadful. People held handkerchiefs to their noses and the grave-diggers swathed the lower half of their faces in cheesecloth soaked in camphor. Coffins were stacked in piles of fifty under the torrid sun and flies feasted everywhere. Shallow trenches, not two feet deep, were dug in the marshy land, and the workmen stopped frequently to curse or pass a whisky bottle down the line. Half drunk, some of them sang obscene songs, while others kicked bones out of the way with a brutal, "Room fur yo' betters, damn ye . . . !" Carts

dumped their loads of cadavers into the ditches like so much manure and the grave diggers pushed them around with their mattocks and kicked them into position, before spreading a thin layer of loosely heaped clods and a few shovels of lime on top.

People of consequence were interred with little more decorum. Family slaves, up to their waists in water, dug deep graves. Frequently, when the coffins were put in, they would not sink until the slaves, holding hands to balance themselves, would stand on each end and see-saw, or a passing grave digger would say, "I'll fix it fur ye," as he drove the point of his pick through the cover of the casket to let out the gases.

No wonder that New Orleans was known up and down the river as the "Wet Grave."

It was yellow fever that, just before the Civil War, split the New Orleans medical fraternity into warring camps and precipitated a battle royal that lasted some fifteen years.

Jean Charles Faget, D.M.P., declared in an article that Creoles and Negroes were immune, and that the disease from which they sometimes suffered, wrongly diagnosed as yellow fever, was in reality nothing but "*fièvre paludéene*."

Charles Chauvin Boisclair Deléry, also Creole and a D.M.P., denied this statement categorically, insisting that Creoles and Negroes could catch yellow fever just like anyone else. The discussion waxed hot, first in the medical journal and then in the daily press. Not a doctor in New Orleans but took sides and both factions inundated the city with a polemical wave of articles, brochures and books.

Finally feeling ran so high that Deléry challenged Faget to a duel, but the latter refused to fight on the ground that he was a Christian. In anyone else this might have been considered cowardice, but not in Faget, for he was so fanatically religious that, whenever he was called in on a serious case, the first question he asked was, "Has the patient performed his religious duties and had the last rites administered?"

If this was answered in the affirmative, he invariably replied, "Ah, well, if he's made his peace with God, just think how much better off he would be if he were dead." This peculiarity interfered somewhat with his practice, as the élite of New Orleans came to feel that his bedside manner was a trifle disheartening

In spite of this he was really a learned person, wrote voluminously on medical subjects and was the first to use the clinical thermometer in Louisiana. In 1858 he discovered the lack of correlation between pulse and temperature in yellow fever, which permitted a surer and much earlier diagnosis and he was also the first to employ chloroform in childbirth cases. He fared much better than his Scotch colleague who introduced it into Edinburgh. There the clergy preached that woman was a sinful vessel and labor pains had been imposed upon her by an all merciful God as a means of expiation; and, therefore, that any mitigation of her suffering by artificial means was a direct flouting of God's wishes. This so stirred public opinion, that the humane doctor was almost mobbed.

The pious Dr. Faget was tremendously picturesque. Tall, slight and erect, with hair waving back from a fine forehead and a profile slightly reminiscent of George Washington's, he generally wrapped himself in a long black cape, fastened at the neck by a silver chain, and wore a low-crowned beaver whose broad brim rolled slightly like that of a priest.

Nothing could be more his opposite than Deléry, who was one of those thin peppery little men who delight in controversy. Only a lifelong diet of roast pelican, stuffed with firecrackers, could possibly explain his belligerency. He was always getting into fights.

Once, as a joke, a young Creole doctor of Deléry's acquaintance procured the heart of a goose, which had been afflicted with a pericardiac condition, and presented it to Dr. Rouanet for his opinion. The testy old Frenchman, an internationally known authority on cardiac diseases, pronounced the heart that of an infant, three or four years old, and, after descanting learnedly on the disease, asked to be taken to view the body of the child from which it had been removed.

This delighted Deléry, who had chafed under Rouanet's ill-concealed feeling of superiority, and he immediately composed a fable in French verse called *The Doctor and the Goose*, which, of course, he could not resist reading to his friends. It soon came to Rouanet's ears that he was being lampooned and he immediately challenged Deléry to a duel. At the first exchange of shots both men were grazed by bullets and the seconds declared that honor was satisfied.

Although Deléry opposed Louisiana's seceding from the Union,

when New Orleans was captured, he gave up his polemics and pistol battles with his confrères to pour his vitriol upon the invading Yankees.

Passions ran so high they betrayed both sides into puerilities. Southern women spat at Northern officers as they passed them in the street, or ostentatiously pulled their skirts aside; while some few Yankee privates retaliated by sewing Confederate flags on the seats of their pants and, when any lady was particularly insulting, turning around and pulling their coat tails aside.

New incidents kept continually adding to the flames. An order was issued that no vessel could land in New Orleans between sunset and sunrise. One day a Sunday school picnic, returning in a barge to New Orleans, did not arrive until after dark and so was not permitted to land by the sentries. In vain frantic fathers besieged General Butler's headquarters, only to be told that "orders were orders." Naturally the news spread and the next morning a great crowd of women were on the levee to welcome the bedraggled picnickers who had been out on the river all night without any conveniences. All the ladies were wildly waving handkerchiefs, when a keen-eyed Federal officer noticed that a small Confederate flag was embroidered in one corner of each square of filmy cambric. It was strictly against regulations to display the Southern emblem, so the officer ordered his men to seize the handkerchiefs; but before they could obey, the ladies tore off the corners and resolutely swallowed the flags.

At last when two Yankee Officers on their way to church were inundated by the contents of a vessel emptied from a gallery above, General Butler issued his notorious "Order 28," in which he said that if any female insulted any soldier of the United States, she be "held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her vocation."

Although there is no case on record where a soldier took advantage of this, the wording of the order alone was enough to stir the whole South to a white heat and even to cause repercussions in the European press. After that the author of the order was always spoken of as "Beast Butler" and the depths of the hatred against him may be judged by the rather silly fact that the owner of a small pottery made a tidy sum by bootlegging chamber pots with a picture of General Butler in the bottom.

Naturally Dr. and Madame Deléry were swept into this whirlpool

of hate, and, whenever she saw a Yankee soldier on the street, she stopped and sharpened her finger at him in the schoolboy sign of "shame on you," because, speaking no English, she could only insult him by pantomime.

The doctor, for his part, inundated the Creole papers with such ferocious philippics in French against the "tyrants" that the editors dared not publish them for fear of being arrested and having their plants confiscated. His poetical barrage against General Butler was a pure gem of ineffectual invective. In one effusion, after asking oratorically, "What belly has vomited you forth, in what den were you conceived, how could so scaly a reptile not rend your mother's entrails when you were born?" he continued by politely suggesting that "Humanity blushes to call you a man, you panther, hyena, jackal, tiger,—all in one—you synthesis of all calamities!"

Once again Deléry could not resist the pleasure of reading his own poetry and so news of his lyrical attack soon percolated to Butler, who ordered his arrest. Some of the doctor's friends, getting word of this, hurried to his house to save him. Knowing he would never run away, but would insist upon defying "Butler and his bloody bayonets," they told the fiery little doctor that a vessel had just docked, loaded with fine French wines, and invited him to go aboard to sample them. Deléry accepted and, after he had been on the boat long enough to imbibe a bottle or two of good Bordeaux, his friends made some excuse and stole ashore. The ship immediately set sail and, when the doctor finally discovered he had been shanghaied, he was furious but helpless. He was landed in Paris and there spent his time writing pamphlets excoriating the North.

When the war was over he returned to New Orleans, resumed his guerilla warfare with Faget, and bitterly attacked the Afro-Carpetbag régime in verse, prose and plays.

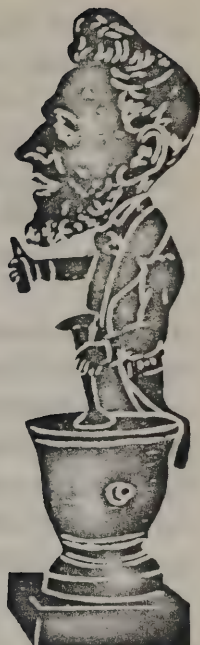
Unfortunately in his old age, having discovered an Indian febrifuge, he advertised its virtues in long poems in the press; and it seems pathetic that a man who had done so much and such fearless writing should make his swan song a paean of praise for a patent medicine.

These French and Creole doctors often indulged in hobbies, as did Dr. Rapalo, who mended umbrellas as a business when calls were few; but their most unconquerable passion seemed to be for founding news-



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- 6. Dr. Guesnard
- 7. L. Pinac, druggist
- 8. Dr. Jean-Charles Faget
(1818-1884)
- 9. Dr. Auguste Natili
- 10. Dr. Rapalo



10

papers. To name but a few, Dr. Soutterre started a scholarly periodical in Baton Rouge; Bahier, Fortin and Daret, all D.M.P.'s, founded in 1834 the first medical periodical in Louisiana: *Journal de la Société médicale de la Nouvelle-Orléans*; and Dr. Auguste Natili and Alfred Mercier, D.M.P., an admirable novelist and essayist, edited weekly papers for several years. But the man who held the record in this field was old Dr. Testut, who, in addition to writing volumes of poetry and historical novels, founded nine ephemeral newspapers.

L'Equité, one he edited in Reconstruction days lived only six months; which is not surprising as he violently espoused the Negro cause, defended the Masons and attacked the Pope in a Southern city that was overwhelmingly Catholic, and, to cap the climax, affirmed a belief in spiritism. He was just as choleric and pugnacious as Dr. Deléry, and, when Caron the editor of *La Commune* made the mistake of stating in his paper that Testut was born on the island of Guadeloupe, the irascible old Frenchman challenged him to a duel. When Caron refused on the ground that he had a wife and children to support, Testut published an outrageous attack against him in *L'Equité* which began with the courteous statement, "I spit in your face!"

Another paper in defense of the Afro-Carpetbag cause was launched, some time before Testut's, by Dr. Louis C. Roudanez, who had served as an interne in a Parisian hospital. He was an intelligent octoroon, originally from Santo Domingo, who, strangely enough, had built up quite a practice among the white Creole families of New Orleans.

A class of free men of color had grown up in Louisiana, many of them sons of Frenchmen, who had sent their miscegenated offspring to the best Parisian schools. In 1860 out of a population of 150,000 in New Orleans, 10,000 belonged to this group and paid taxes upon \$15,000,000 worth of property. Many owned slaves and lived in such luxury that, when one octoroon family entertained General Butler, seven courses were served on solid silver plates.

The presence of Federal troops, after the city was captured in 1862, emboldened Dr. Roudanez to the point of believing that the time had come to arouse this class of colored men to fight for social and political equality; so, with his brother and some friends, he launched the first Negro newspaper in Louisiana. It was called *L'Union* and, of course, aroused the fiercest animosities among the white Southerners, who

threatened to kill the editor and burn the paper. As a consequence, some of Roudanez' associates became frightened and insisted that publication be stopped; but it did not deter the doctor. He bought out the plant and immediately started another bi-lingual paper: *La Tribune de la Nouvelle-Orléans*.

His editor was a white man, who masqueraded under the pseudonym of "C. P. Dalloz," although he was in reality a distinguished Belgian astronomer, Jean Charles Houzeau, author of many scientific works and a member both of the Royal Academy of Belgium and of the French Institute. His exile from his native land on account of Republican ideas and the fact of his being a foreigner explain the vehement four years' campaign he conducted in the *Tribune* in favor of Negro equality. Perfectly fearless in the face of repeated threats against his life, he was present at the meeting of the Constitutional Convention in Mechanic's Hall when it was mobbed in 1866 and so many of its members, both Negroes and Carpetbaggers, were slaughtered. He escaped by a miracle and went directly to his office, although he knew it might be attacked at any moment, and got out an edition of the *Tribune*, containing a full account of the horrors of the riot. The files of this paper preserve the most intelligent picture I know of the Negro side of the passionate battle for white supremacy.

The other side of the question was defended, and with much more humor, by a French weekly published by another doctor—J. M. Durel, D.M.P., white and a Creole. After serving through the Civil War as a Confederate surgeon, he returned to New Orleans a ruined man and attempted to rebuild a practice among people as hard hit as himself. During the period of "Reconstruction" which followed, he was outraged by the wrongs and misgovernment he saw inflicted upon his people and he suggested to a few friends that they found a paper to champion their rights. *Le Carillon* was the result and first appeared in 1869, just when the spoliation of Louisiana by the Afro-Carpetbaggers was at its worst and the impotent rage of her helpless white inhabitants at its hottest. This gay, irreverent little French paper had the temerity to declare in its first issue that, if Carpetbaggers were licensed like peddlers, the fees would amount to enough to save the state from bankruptcy. All New Orleans laughed and over night the *Carillon* became a much needed safety valve for the hate and pent up bitterness of

the Creoles. Although it published all sorts of sarcastic editorials, satirical attacks and scathing cartoons, it only lasted a few months.

But, during the next two years, the idea of resurrecting it became such an obsession with Durel that his wife finally sacrificed her mother's jewels to provide money to revive the weekly. The doctor was suffering from dropsy, but not even this could keep him from treating patients all day and writing editorials or music critiques half the night. In one of these latter he offended Calabresi, the impresario of the opera, who challenged him. They exchanged pistol shots at twenty paces, but luckily no one was hurt.

This time the paper became a success and was even more sprightly and biting than it had been before. It defined the mulatto as an "inferior race much less useful to society than would be the adulterous offspring of a carp and a rabbit"; spoke of the state legislative body as "*Le Sénat Radicanaille*;" and published an impudent quatrain about the Carpetbag governor, which ran:

*The other day in a swampy bog
A serpent bit Wm. Pitt Kellogg.
Who was poisoned, do you say?
The snake; it died that very day.*

Indulging in the most sizzling and extravagant invective, it also accused Kellogg of being "a renegade hog, without faith or honor, in whose chest beats the heart of a coward and whose specialty is licking niggers' feet to gain his own ends. He should be hung!"

When the officers of a Federal man-of-war invited the ladies to tea, the *Carillon* said it could not believe that any daughter of Louisiana would fall so low as to go "peacocking on the Yankee battleships of that drunken dipsomaniac, Grant" and "insult the crepe and tears of the widows of those noble martyrs who gave their blood for our liberties."

From time to time, it printed the most Rabelaisian accounts of the doings of the Negro legislators, giving a particularly hilarious description of a Carnival ball attended by twenty-seven black senators, accompanied by "fifty-seven of their legitimate spouses." But the particular object of its humorous attack was a small, black Negro, César C. Antoine, an ex-barber who had gone into politics and become state senator and then lieutenant-governor. He was a peculiarly fruitful sub-

ject for caricature because he always appeared in public in top hat, frock coat, green gloves and a cane. The *Carillon* often referred to him as the "Orang-outang," and never tired of depicting him in embarrassing positions, such as being shot in the pants while stealing okra or having his eye blacked by his huge wife Francoese. It even purported to give accounts of their domestic conversations and made Antoine ask his "Lieutenant-Governess" whether she did not think it strange for two such black people as they were to have such a light, "*café-au-lait*" child. With great presence of mind, she hid her infidelities by answering, "Why you poor imbecile, haven't you ever seen a black hen lay a white egg?"

Le Carillon, which Lafcadio Hearn called a "fierce, brilliant and witty little journal," had its serious side as well, and its files present the most startling graphic picture, anywhere to be found, of the Creoles' emotional reaction to Reconstruction. Reflecting the character of its editor, this weekly was the most fearless and outspoken of any New Orleans journal of the day, and the important part it played in restoring white supremacy to Louisiana justified the many sacrifices made by the doctor and his wife to keep it alive.

Finally Dr. Durel became too ill to continue and, in 1875, the *Carillon* ceased publication. A month later the doctor died,—a worthy member of that witty and erudite, gay and choleric group of men who practiced medicine in Louisiana in the 1800's and were equally proficient with pen, pills or pistols.

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